

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

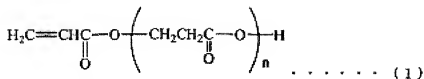
LISTING OF CLAIMS:

1. (currently amended): A water-soluble thickener comprising a water-soluble non-crosslinked copolymer having a weight-average molecular weight of 6,000,000 or higher obtainable by polymerizing a monomer mixture which comprises 2-acrylamido-2-methylpropanesulfonic acid and/or a salt thereof and acrylic acid and/or a salt thereof as essential components and optionally other copolymerizable monomer components,

wherein 2-acrylamido-2-methylpropanesulfonic acid and/or a salt thereof represents 20 mol% or more of all the monomers.

2. (original): The water-soluble thickener according to claim 1,
wherein the monomer mixture comprises 20 to 60 mol% of 2-acrylamido-2-methylpropanesulfonic acid and/or a salt thereof, 80 to 20 mol% of acrylic acid and/or a salt thereof, and optionally 0 to 20 mol% of the other copolymerizable monomers.

3. (previously presented): The water-soluble thickener according to claim 1,
wherein the monomer mixture comprises a compound represented by the following formula (1):



(wherein n is an integer of 1 to 12)

and/or a salt thereof as the other copolymerizable monomer components.

4. (currently amended): ~~A liquid~~ An aqueous acidic detergent solution ~~consisting of an aqueous solution~~ which comprises a mineral acid and/or an organic acid and the water-soluble thickener according to ~~claims~~claim 1.

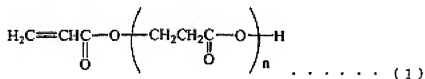
5. (currently amended): ~~A liquid~~ An aqueous acidic detergent solution ~~consisting of an aqueous solution~~ which comprises 3 to 30% by weight of a mineral acid and/or an organic acid and 0.02 to 5% by weight of the water-soluble thickener according to claims 1.

6. (currently amended): A thickening method comprising ~~[[the]]~~ a step of adding the following water soluble non-crosslinked copolymer to an acidic aqueous solution or an acidic emulsion:

a water-soluble non-crosslinked copolymer having a weight-average molecular weight of 6,000,000 or higher obtainable by polymerizing a monomer mixture which comprises 2-acrylamido-2-methylpropanesulfonic acid and/or a salt thereof and acrylic acid and/or a salt thereof as essential components and optionally other copolymerizable monomer components,

wherein 2-acrylamido-2-methylpropanesulfonic acid and/or a salt thereof represents 20 mol% or more of all the monomers.

7. (previously presented): The water-soluble thickener according to claim 2, wherein the monomer mixture comprises a compound represented by the following formula (1):



(wherein n is an integer of 1 to 12)

and/or a salt thereof as the other copolymerizable monomer components.

8. (currently amended): ~~A liquid~~ An aqueous acidic detergent solution ~~consisting of an aqueous solution~~ which comprises a mineral acid and/or an organic acid and the water-soluble thickener according to claim 2.

9. (currently amended): ~~A liquid~~ An aqueous acidic detergent solution ~~consisting of an aqueous solution~~ which comprises a mineral acid and/or an organic acid and the water-soluble thickener according to claim 3.

10. (currently amended): ~~A liquid~~ An aqueous acidic detergent solution ~~consisting of an aqueous solution~~ which comprises a mineral acid and/or an organic acid and the water-soluble thickener according to claim 4.

11. (currently amended): ~~A liquid~~ An aqueous acidic detergent solution ~~consisting of an aqueous solution~~ which comprises 3 to 30% by weight of a mineral acid and/or an organic acid and 0.02 to 5% by weight of the water-soluble thickener according to claim 2.

12. (currently amended): ~~A liquid~~ An aqueous acidic detergent solution ~~consisting of an aqueous solution~~ which comprises 3 to 30% by weight of a mineral acid and/or an organic acid and 0.02 to 5% by weight of the water-soluble thickener according to claim 3.

13. (currently amended): ~~A liquid~~ An aqueous acidic detergent solution ~~consisting of an aqueous solution~~ which comprises 3 to 30% by weight of a mineral acid and/or an organic acid and 0.02 to 5% by weight of the water-soluble thickener according to claim 4.

14. (new): The water-soluble thickener according to claim 1 comprising a water-soluble non-crosslinked copolymer having a weight average molecular weight of 6,000,000 or higher obtainable by polymerizing a monomer mixture of which comprises 2-acrylamido-2-methylpropane sulfonic acid and/or a salt thereof and acrylic acid and/or a salt thereof as essential components in the absence of a crosslinking monomer.

15. (new): An aqueous acid detergent solution according to claim 4, wherein the detergent solution is strongly acidic.

16. (new): The water-soluble thickener according to claim 1 comprising a water-soluble non-crosslinked copolymer having a weight average molecular weight of 6,000,000 or higher, wherein the copolymer is not an ampholyte copolymer.